

# Milepost

## NEWSLETTER



### Making the Best Decision About the I-77/I-81 Study

This past winter the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) kicked off the I-77/I-81 Location Study in Wythe County. The purpose of the study is to develop alternatives to alleviate congestion on the 11-mile overlap of the two interstates in Wythe County which, in response to public input, was determined to be a priority for I-81 improvements in the Bristol District by the Commonwealth Transportation Board.

The Location Study Process will consider the No-Build, Transportation System Management (TSM), and Build Alternatives. A No-Build Alternative would utilize

only the programmed construction and maintenance projects in the study

area to improve traffic operations and safety. This alternative provides a baseline condition against which other alternatives can be compared.

The TSM Alternative would employ minor improvements to the roadway to maximize efficiency and traffic operations. TSM is intended to be a less expensive alternative with most of the improvement work being done within the existing right of way limits. Major improvements to the roadway, such as geometric changes, additional lanes, interchange improvements, or separation of the two roadways constitute a Build Alternative, rather than TSM.

The VDOT's Study Team will look within the Interstate 77/81 study window and develop Build Alternative options using technical data such as traffic counts, aerial mapping and early environmental evaluations.

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### Introducing the I-77/I-81 Milepost Newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of the I-77/I-81 Milepost, a periodic newsletter about the I-77/I-81 Location Study published by the Virginia Department of Transportation. Public involvement in the Location Study Process is one of the VDOT's top priorities. Throughout this newsletter you will read about the many tools that the VDOT is utilizing to encourage public participation at appropriate times throughout the Study.

### Get Involved! Attend the Public Participation Meeting.

Please mark your calendars to attend the I-77/I-81 Public Participation Meeting. The meeting will be held in an open forum format, so come any time between 4:30 P.M. and 7:30 P.M. Representatives from the Study Team will be on hand to answer your questions and receive your input regarding the project.

Monday, October 29, 2001  
4:30 P.M.-7:30 P.M.  
Fort Chiswell High School  
1 Pioneer Trail  
Max Meadows, VA 24360  
(540) 637-3437

Directions:  
On Interstate 77 and 81 take Exit 80 to Route 52 south approximately 1.3 miles on the left.



## Focus on the Environment

The potential impact of a new roadway on the environment is an especially important factor that is carefully considered during a Location Study. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the VDOT to follow an established process to complete the environmental evaluation of alternatives.

Environmental studies for major projects are compiled in a report called a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Once the DEIS is completed and approved by FHWA, a Location Public Hearing is scheduled so that citizens

can review the document and provide their formal comments about the proposed alternatives. The DEIS and public input are forwarded to the Commonwealth Transportation Board for its consideration in determining an alternative for the I-77/I-81 Study.

If a Build Alternative is selected, a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will be prepared documenting the selected alternative. The process is completed when

the FHWA approves the final document and issues its Record of Decision. The following are some of the typical environmental issues that will be studied and analyzed in the DEIS:

- Land use
- Noise
- Impact to communities
- Water quality and wetlands
- Traffic and safety
- Air quality
- Historic and archaeological resources
- Parks and recreation areas
- Economic development



## Partnering with Virginia Tech

The VDOT is proud to have Virginia Tech as a member of the I-77/I-81 Location Study Team. Under the leadership of Mr. Ray Pethtel, University Transportation Fellow and Associate Director of the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, the VDOT will use Virginia Tech's transportation expertise and technology to examine traffic impacts, and study the economic impact of the No-Build, TSM, and Build Alternatives. Virginia Tech also will provide assistance throughout the public participation process.

## Making the Best Decision About the I-77/I-81 Study

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Since January 2001, members of the Location Study Team have been working in the study corridor collecting data for the No-Build, TSM, and Build Alternatives and defining potential roadway segments to be studied. These "concept segments" are a starting point for the Study Team and the public to begin defining viable options. The "concept segments" are shown on the map within this newsletter.

One of the most important parts of the Location Study is citizen input. Citizens who live and work in the area know special landmarks, congested

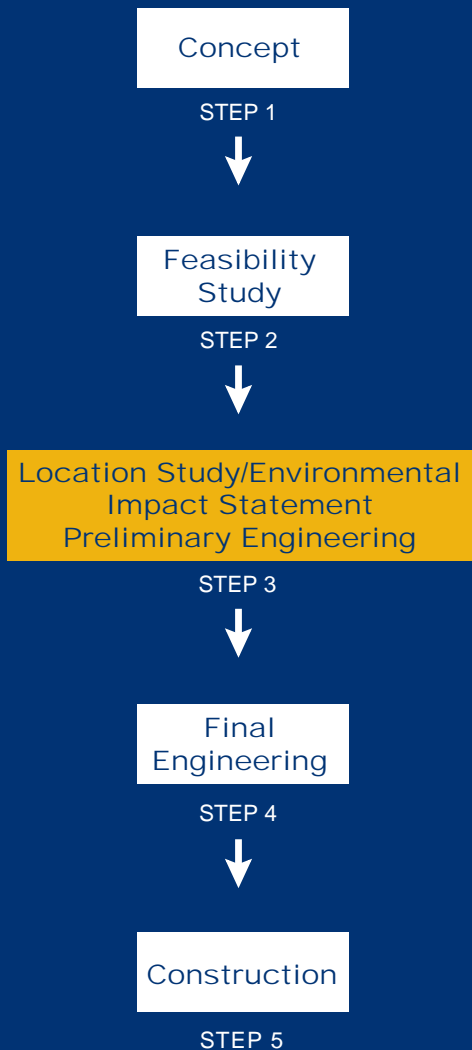


and dangerous travel areas, as well as cultural, recreational, and natural resources that should be identified. That's why the VDOT is holding the I-77/I-81 Public Participation Meeting on October 29, 2001 from 4:30 P.M. until 7:30 P.M. at Fort

Chiswell High School. At this meeting, citizens will have the opportunity to review the "concept segments" that have been proposed and provide representatives of the VDOT Location Study Team with their opinions. Please plan to attend.



## What is a Location Study?



The Location Study is the third of five major steps required in the project development process. In 1999, the VDOT completed an Improvement Study for Interstate 81 that included the section of Interstates 77 and 81 that overlap in Wythe County (Steps 1 and 2). In response to public input from Citizen Information Meetings, the possibility of separation of the two interstates is being considered as part of this project.

The VDOT will look at this corridor more closely (Step 3) to identify possible alternatives for improvements to the roadway. Improvements to the existing corridor including the interchange areas will be examined in this effort. The possibility of separating the roadways by relocating one to a new location and improving the other on the existing roadway will also be examined as an alternative. As a result of the study process, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the Location Study Report will be produced. These documents will be available for review and public comment as part of the Location Public Hearing that will occur later in the process.

The Commonwealth Transportation Board will use the study information, including public input, to select an alternative—No-Build, Transportation System Management (TSM), or a Build Alternative. If a Build Alternative is selected, a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will be produced and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will issue a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD provides documentation of the FHWA decision along with any required mitigation. Once a ROD is issued and as funding becomes available, final engineering (Step 4) will begin.



To date no funding has been set aside for Step 5, construction of this project. The Commonwealth Transportation Board previously allocated planning money for the project's early stages.

## How Can I Get Involved?

We realize citizens are very busy so we have tried to create ways to make it easy to stay involved in the I-77/I-81 Location Study process. Whether you prefer to use your computer, send a letter or call us on the phone, you have several options to provide input to the study process. The following are some of the ways you can stay involved.

■ **I-77/I-81 Location Study Toll-Free Line**

1-866-5-177-181

(866) 547-7481

The hearing impaired may call toll-free  
1-800-307-4630.

■ **Interactive website.** Go to [www.vdot.state.va.us](http://www.vdot.state.va.us) and click on the Projects button or go to [www.interchange77-81.com](http://www.interchange77-81.com).

■ **Newsletter.** We will be sending Study updates via our newsletter throughout the project period. Call us on the toll-free line to be added to the mailing list.

■ **Citizens Advisory Group.** Representatives from Virginia Tech are facilitating a Citizens Advisory Group to solicit community input.

■ **Public Participation Meetings.** At key points during the Location Study Process, the VDOT will hold Public Information Meetings to keep citizens involved and receive their input about the project.

■ **Location Public Hearing.** This is the time for citizens to review the information gathered during the Location Study and make their formal comments to the VDOT.

## Why Additional Study?

In 1999, the VDOT completed an Improvement Study for Interstate 81 that included sections of Interstates 81 and 77 that overlap in Wythe County. The Study generally looked at alternatives to widen the interstate in its present location as part of the overall I-81 Improvement Study from Bristol to Winchester. As a result of this study and public input received during the I-81 Improvement Public Meetings, it was determined that a more detailed, thorough review of the No-Build, Transportation System Management (TSM) and Build Alternatives must be performed.

During the I-77/I-81 Location Study, the Study Team will perform an in-depth review considering cultural/historical resource data, economic and right-of-way impacts, terrain, geology, construction feasibility, impacts of traffic during construction, safety and how proposed locations would serve the nation's interstate network.

It is essential that the community understands that before any decision will be made concerning the I-77/I-81 study, considerable and detailed engineering and environmental studies are needed, along with valuable public input and involvement.



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